MARVEL

390

CATES
IRVING

DOCTOR STRANGE

STEPHEN STRANGE WAS A PREEMINENT SURGEON UNTIL A CAR ACCIDENT DAMAGED THE NERVES IN HIS HANDS. HIS EGO DROVE HIM TO SCOUR THE GLOBE FOR A MIRACLE CURE. INSTEAD, HE FOUND A MYSTERIOUS WIZARD CALLED THE ANCIENT ONE WHO TAUGHT HIM MAGIC AND THAT THERE ARE THINGS IN THIS WORLD BIGGER THAN HIMSELF. THESE LESSONS ENABLED STEPHEN TO BECOME THE SORCERER SUPREME, EARTH'S FIRST DEFENSE AGAINST ALL MANNER OF MAGICAL THREATS. HIS PATIENTS CALL HIM...

DOCTOR STRANGE

LAST TIME...

WITH HIS FRIENDS' HELP, DOCTOR STRANGE ESCAPED FROM A NETHER HELL-DIMENSION AND REPAIRED THE DAMAGE HE'D CAUSED WHEN HE RESURRECTED LAS VEGAS AND ITS PEOPLE FROM DEVASTATION UNDER HYDRA--A MAGICAL OVERDRAFT THAT BROUGHT MEPHISTO TO EARTH AS PENALTY. WITH THE DEVIL IMPRISONED, STEPHEN RETURNED TO NEW YORK WITH MORE WORK AHEAD. MONTHS AGO, LOKI TOOK ADVANTAGE OF STRANGE'S EBBING CONFIDENCE AND CONVINCED EVERYONE THE TRICKSTER HAD WON THE TITLE OF SORCERER SUPREME IN A TOURNAMENT. ASHAMED, STRANGE WITHDREW FROM HIS CLOSEST FRIENDS, INCLUDING ZELMA STANTON--STEPHEN'S APPRENTICE AND COMPANION WHO HAS SAVED HIS LIFE MORE THAN ONCE. STRANGE RECLAIMED HIS TITLE IN A CATACLYSMIC BATTLE THAT WRECKED THE SANCTUM SANCTORUM...AND THE REMNANTS OF ZELMA'S TRUST.

"STRANGE WAY TO GO" FINALE

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DOCTOR STRANGE CREATED BY STAN LEE & STEVE DITKO

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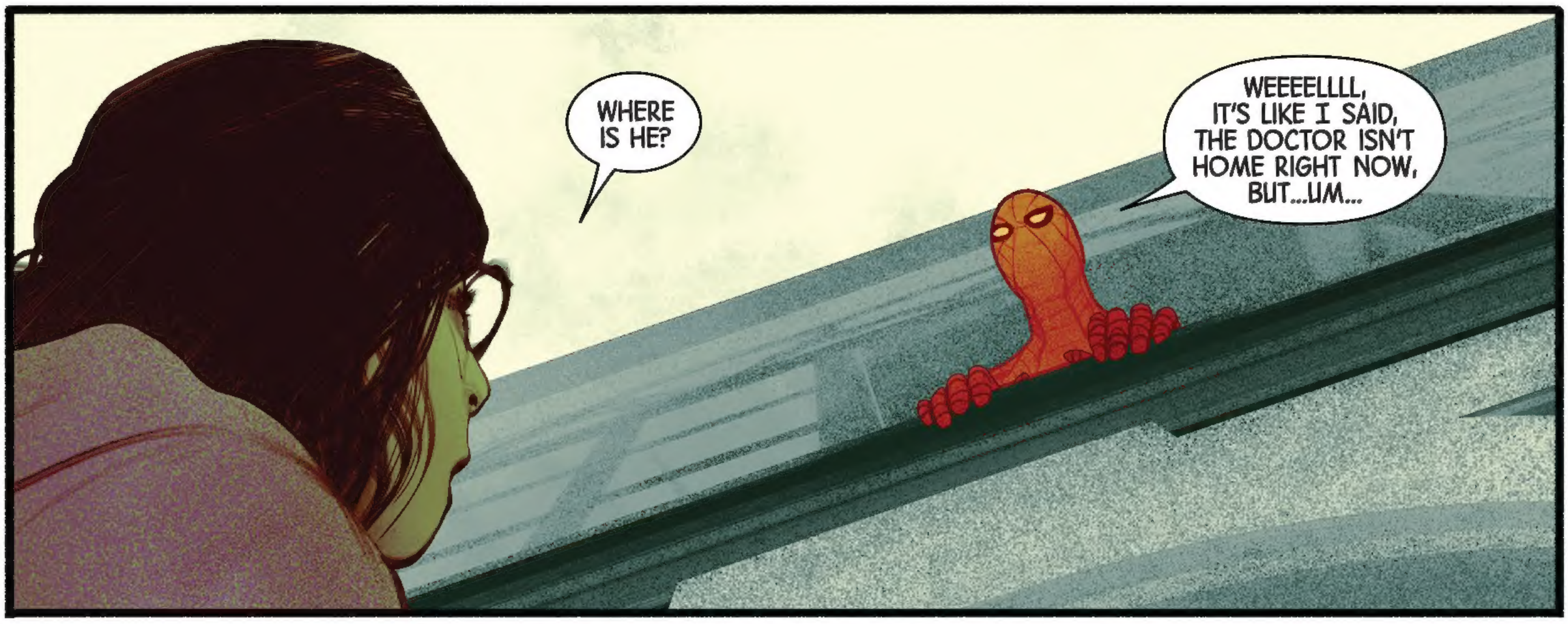
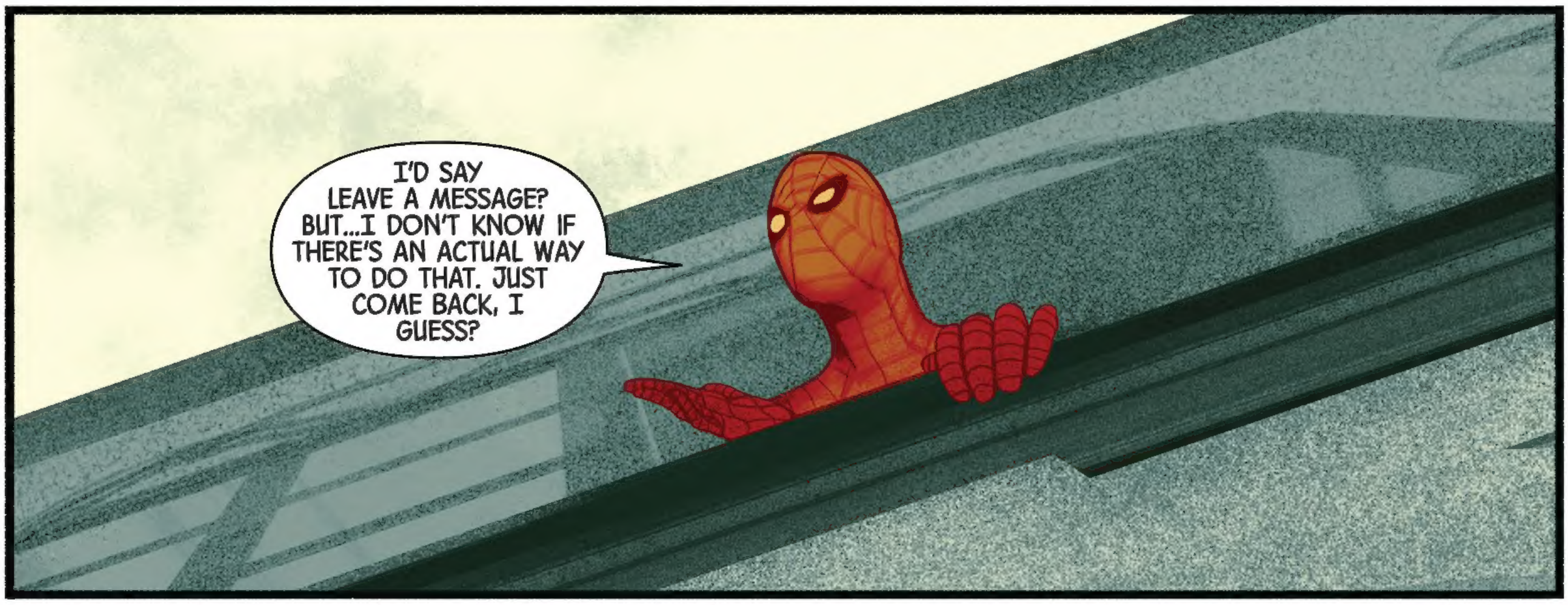
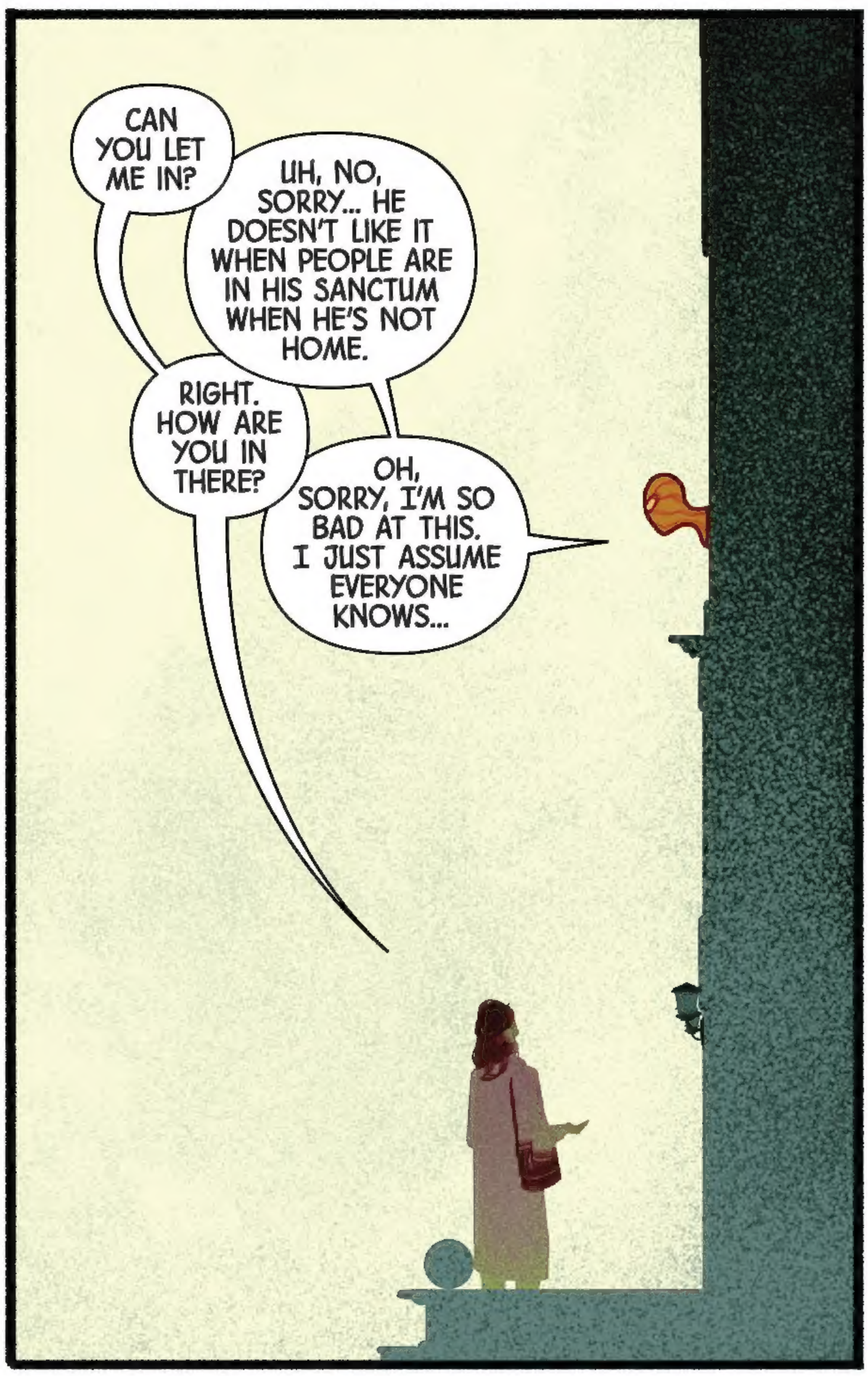
BLEECKER ST
TEMPORARILY CLOSED FOR REPAIR

KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK


WHERE IS HE?
WEEEELLLL, IT'S LIKE I SAID, THE DOCTOR ISN'T HOME RIGHT NOW, BUT...UM...


I'D SAY LEAVE A MESSAGE? BUT...I DON'T KNOW IF THERE'S AN ACTUAL WAY TO DO THAT. JUST COME BACK, I GUESS?

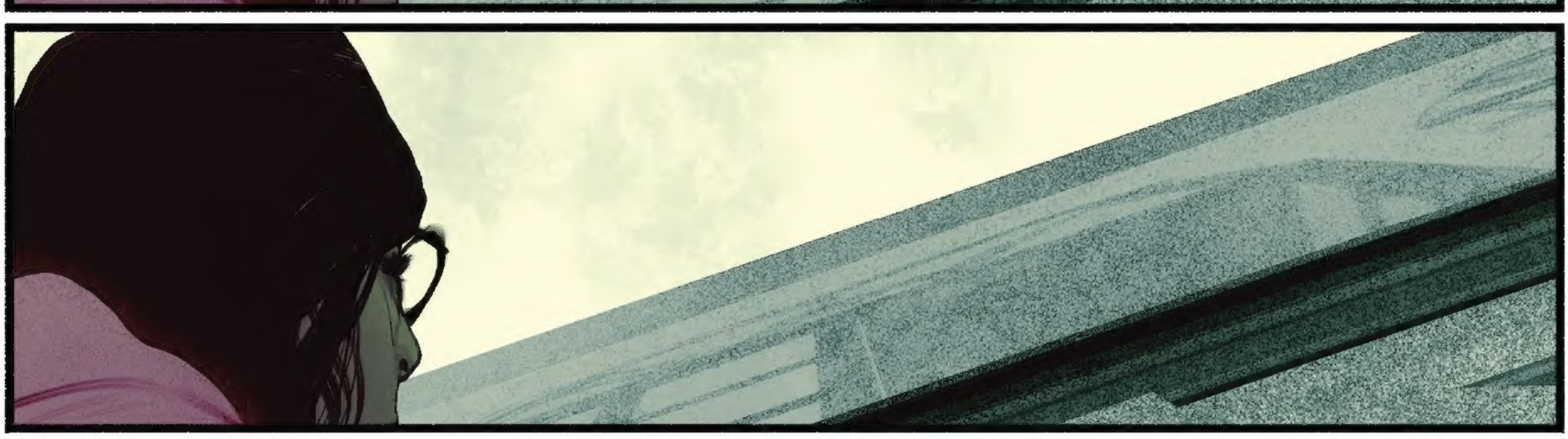

CAN YOU LET ME IN?
UH, NO, SORRY... HE DOESN'T LIKE IT WHEN PEOPLE ARE IN HIS SANCTUM WHEN HE'S NOT HOME.
RIGHT. HOW ARE YOU IN THERE?
OH, SORRY, I'M SO BAD AT THIS. I JUST ASSUME EVERYONE KNOWS...

I'M SPIDER-MAN.

...
THAT DOESN'T... ANSWER THINGS.

OH, WELL, I'M SUPPOSED TO HOUSE-SIT WHILE HE'S OUT. HIS PROTECTION SPELLS AREN'T UP AND RUNNING YET, SO...
I SHOULDN'T HAVE SAID THAT PART.
ARE YOU A...SUPER VILLAIN?

YOU DON'T KNOW WHERE HE IS, DO YOU?
NO, I DO. I JUST CAN'T TELL YOU... CITIZEN.
MY NAME IS ZELMA STANTON.



UNBELIEVABLE.

HI, ZELMA.
YEAH, I HAVE NO IDEA WHERE HE IS.

NIMAL HOSPIT
YOU KNOW, DOC...
OPEN
...DESPITE MILLIONS OF YEARS OF COLLECTIVE INSTINCT PRODUCING AN INTENSE HATRED AND FEAR FOR PLACES LIKE THIS...
CLOSED
...I'M REALLY GONNA MISS THIS DUMP.
YES, I WILL TOO, BATS.
BUT...
...I'M THE SORCERER SUPREME. I CAN NO LONGER HIDE AWAY IN THIS OFFICE PRETENDING TO BE SOMETHING I'M NOT.

THAT AND IT WAS SUPER ILLEGAL, YEAH?

OH, QUITE.
STILL...IT WAS NICE TO HELP PEOPLE.

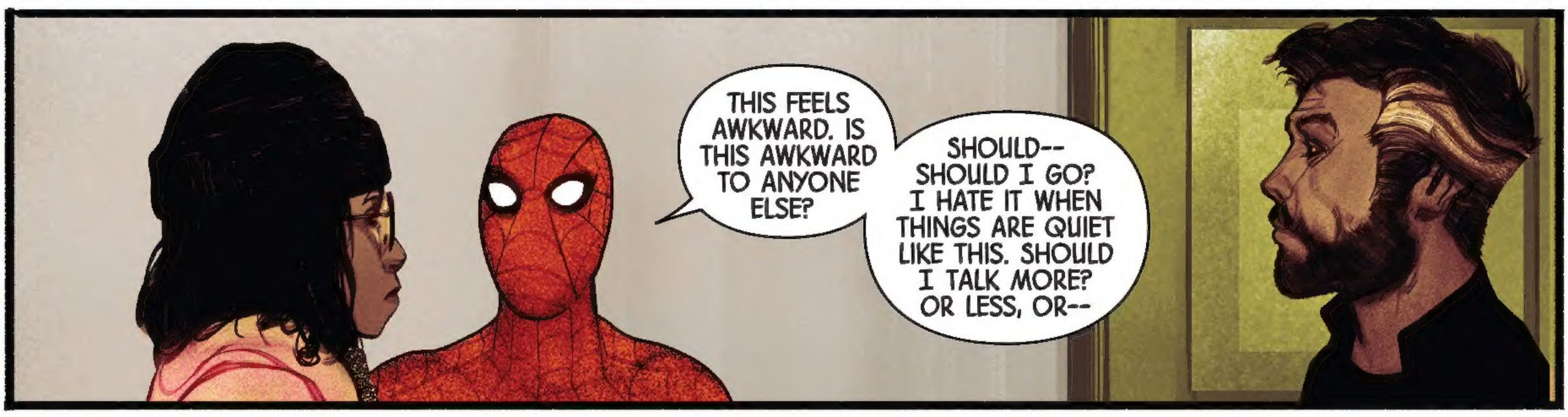
HEY, YOU STOP DYING YOUR HAIR?

KNOCK KNOCK
OH, SOMEONE IS KNOCKING ON THE DOOR.
HOW FORTUITOUS.

I'M TERRIBLY SORRY, BUT WE ARE CLOS--

OH.

HEY.
HEY. HI.


THIS FEELS AWKWARD. IS THIS AWKWARD TO ANYONE ELSE?
SHOULD-- SHOULD I GO? I HATE IT WHEN THINGS ARE QUIET LIKE THIS. SHOULD I TALK MORE? OR LESS, OR--

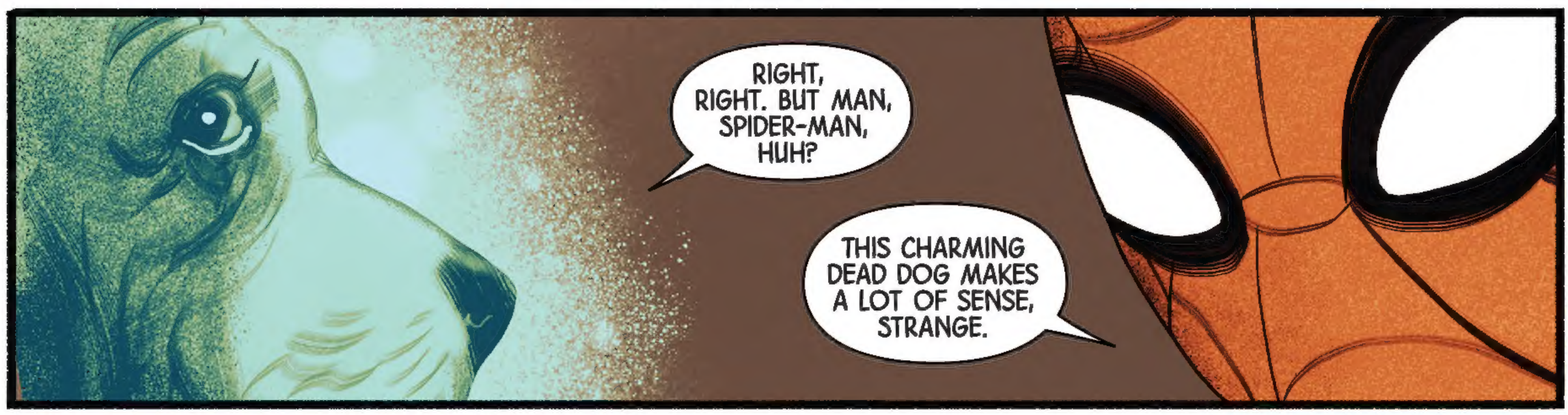
OH MAN, IS THAT A *GHOST DOG?!*

OHMY GODISTHAT SPIDER-MAN?

CAN I PICK HIM UP?!
AHH, HE TALKS! THAT'S SO COOL! STEPHEN, WHY DIDN'T YOU TELL ME YOU HAD A TALKING GHOST DOG!
I'M INTANGIBLE.

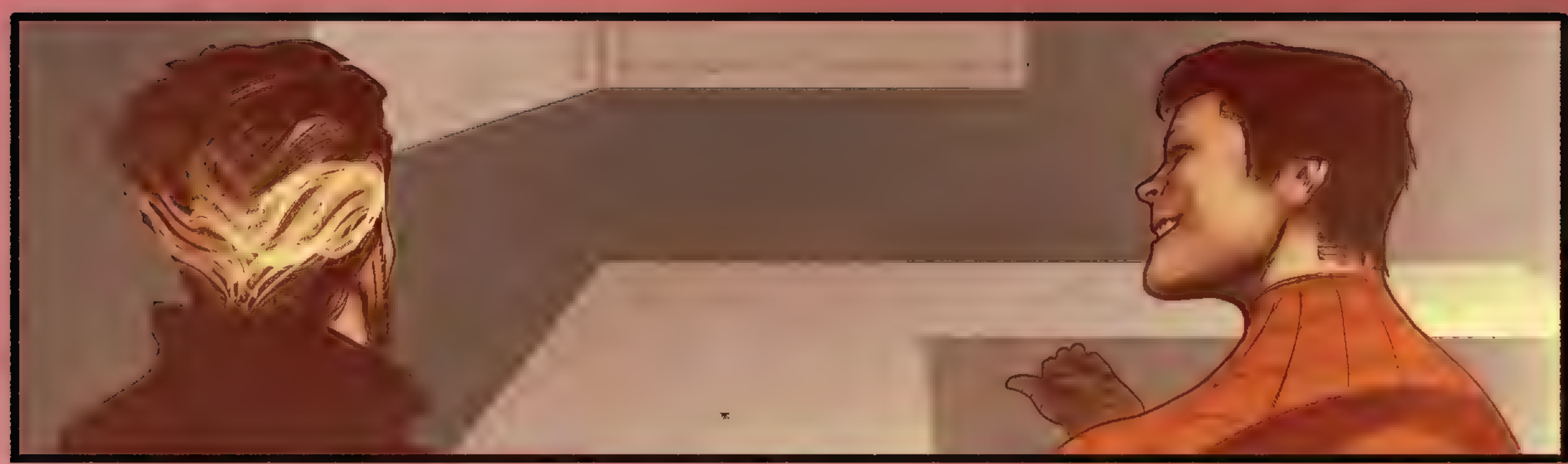
HEY, WOW. WOW. Y-YOU'RE SPIDER-MAN, HUH?
WOW, NEVER MET A REAL-LIFE SUPER HERO BEFORE.

YOU MET THE AVENGERS AND THE MIDNIGHT SONS NOT TWO WEEKS AGO. YOU MET SENTRY. YOU LIVE WITH ME.

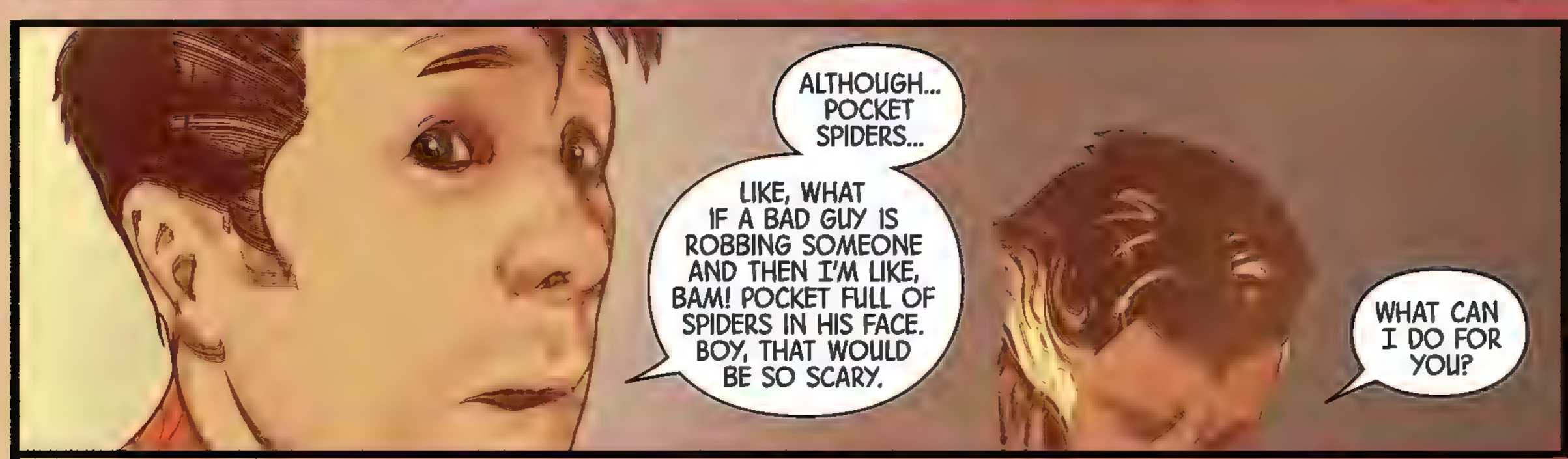

RIGHT, RIGHT. BUT MAN, SPIDER-MAN, HUH?
THIS CHARMING DEAD DOG MAKES A LOT OF SENSE, STRANGE.

ZELMA, IF YOU'LL EXCUSE US FOR A MOMENT?
YEAH.
OKAY. YES. OKAY, JUST ONE MOMENT.
BYE, GHOST DO--
BYE, SPIDER-MAN!!!

PETER, WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE? WHAT'S HAPPENED? WHAT'S WRONG?!
WHAT? NO, I JUST WANTED TO COME AND CHECK ON YOU, IS ALL. ALL THAT LOKI STUFF, AND THE VEGAS THING...
WHY DOES SOMETHING HAVE TO BE WRONG FOR A GUY TO CHECK IN ON HIS FRIEND?
OH. WELL, MY APOLOGIES, PETER. I SUPPOSE WE DON'T DO ENOUGH OF THAT IN THIS LINE OF WORK.
MOST OF THE TIME WHEN A FELLOW AVENGER COMES TO ME IT'S TO SOLVE SOME SORT OF CALAMITOUS MAGICAL NIGHTMARE.
THAT'S...THAT'S VERY KIND OF YOU TO CHECK IN LIKE THIS, PETER.
PETER?
YEAH, CALAMITOUS NIGHTMARE. HEY, CHECK THIS OUT!
LOOK. A SPIDER. COOL, HUH?

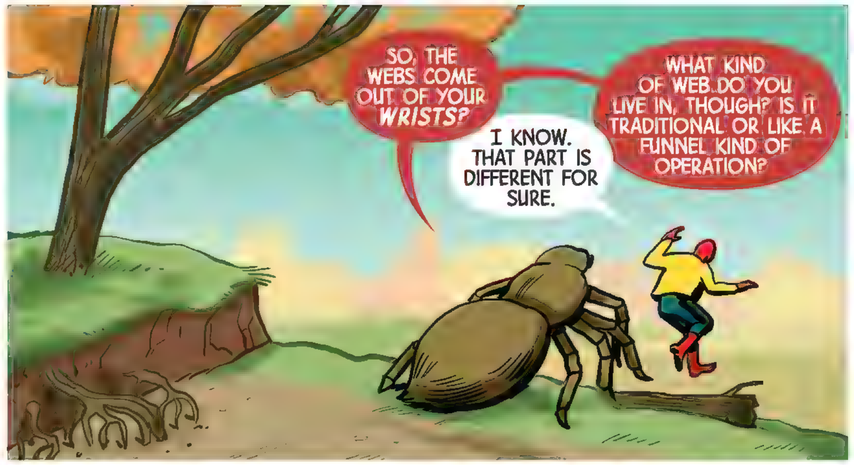


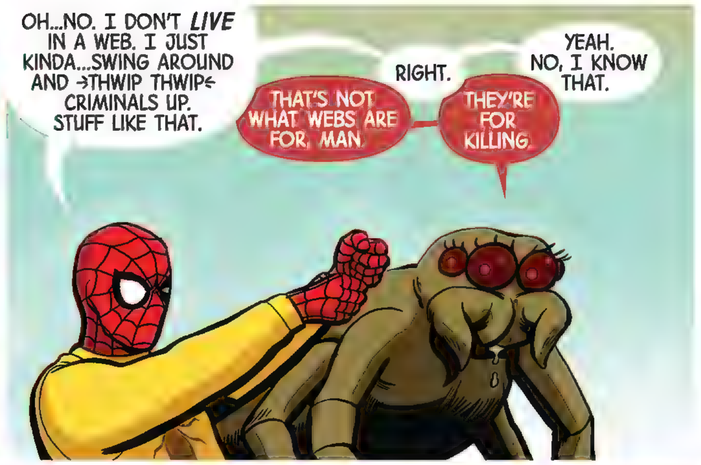
PETER, DID...YOU BRING A SPIDER HERE WITH YOU?
YEAH.
DO YOU... I HAVE TO ASK, DO YOU ALWAYS CARRY SPIDERS WITH YOU? IS THAT A THING THAT YOU'VE BEEN DOING FOR--
WHAT? NO. GROSS.


ALTHOUGH... POCKET SPIDERS...
LIKE, WHAT IF A BAD GUY IS ROBBING SOMEONE AND THEN I'M LIKE, BAM! POCKET FULL OF SPIDERS IN HIS FACE. BOY, THAT WOULD BE SO SCARY.
WHAT CAN I DO FOR YOU?

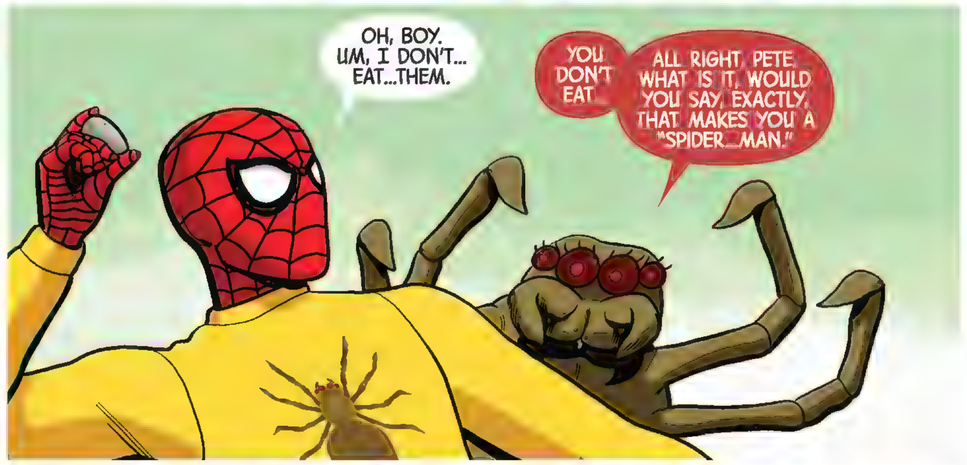
UM...WELL, I HEARD ABOUT THE WHOLE VETERINARIAN THING WHERE YOU DO A THING WHERE YOU, LIKE...THERE'S A SPELL WHERE YOU...
→SIGH← DO YOU WANT TO TALK TO A SPIDER, PETER?

Peter Talks To a Spider
By Donny Cates + Chip Zdarsky


SO, THE WEBS COME OUT OF YOUR WRISTS?
I KNOW. THAT PART IS DIFFERENT FOR SURE.
WHAT KIND OF WEB DO YOU LIVE IN, THOUGH? IS IT TRADITIONAL OR LIKE A FUNNEL KIND OF OPERATION?


OH...NO. I DON'T LIVE IN A WEB. I JUST KINDA...SWING AROUND AND →THWIP THWIP← CRIMINALS UP. STUFF LIKE THAT.
RIGHT.
THAT'S NOT WHAT WEBS ARE FOR, MAN.
YEAH. NO, I KNOW THAT.
THEY'RE FOR KILLING.

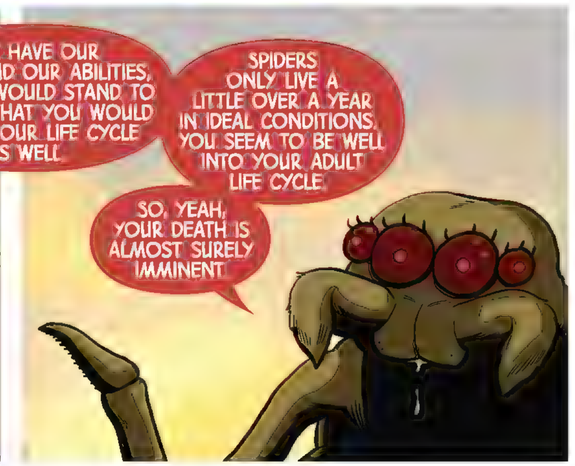
SO, IF YOU DON'T HAVE A WEB, WHERE DO YOU KEEP THE CRIMINALS' BODIES WHILE THEY'RE DISSOLVING?


OH, BOY. UM, I DON'T... EAT...THEM.
YOU DON'T EAT
ALL RIGHT, PETE. WHAT IS IT, WOULD YOU SAY, EXACTLY, THAT MAKES YOU A "SPIDER...MAN."

I'M STRONG. AS STRONG AS A SPIDER! AND...AND I HAVE SPIDER-SENSE! I CAN SENSE DANGER BEFORE IT COMES.
SOUNDS LIKE YOU GOT BIT BY A MAGICIAN.

MAN...
HEY, HEY, DON'T GET BUMMED OUT. I'M SURE YOU'RE A REALLY GOOD MAN-SPIDER.
YEAH?

ABSOLUTELY. I MEAN, THE COSTUME AND THE CRIMEFIGHTING? JEEZ, AND ALL THAT IN UNDER A YEAR? IT'S IMPRESSIVE.
UNDER A YEAR?
YOU HAVE OUR GENES AND OUR ABILITIES, RIGHT? IT WOULD STAND TO REASON THAT YOU WOULD INHERIT OUR LIFE CYCLE AS WELL.


SPIDERS ONLY LIVE A LITTLE OVER A YEAR IN IDEAL CONDITIONS. YOU SEEM TO BE WELL INTO YOUR ADULT LIFE CYCLE.
SO, YEAH, YOUR DEATH IS ALMOST SURELY IMMINENT.

PETE...

...EVERYTHING DIES.

I JUST WANTED YOU TO KNOW THAT... *THIS*...IT HAPPENS TO ALL OF US.

WE ALL... QUIT.

WE ALL GIVE IN TO THE DARKNESS.

WHETHER IT'S FOR A SINGLE SECOND DURING A FIGHT, OR...OR FOR AS LONG AS IT TAKES TO GET OUR HEADS BACK TOGETHER.

ANIMAL ER HOSPITAL
BUT LOOK AT THIS, STEPHEN. LOOK AT WHERE YOU WENT WHEN YOU LEFT BEING A SUPER HERO.

YOU JUST WENT BACK TO BEING A...*REGULAR* HERO. YOU GOT BACK TO THE WORK YOU WERE DOING *BEFORE* YOU HAD POWERS.
THAT SAYS SOMETHING ABOUT YOU.
THAT'S WHO YOU ARE, DOCTOR STRANGE.

REMEMBER THAT.

THAT'S THE GUY YOU HAD HOUSE-SITTING?
HOUSE-SITTING?

SORRY! I HAD TO PEE!

YOU WANT TO TAKE A WALK OR SOMETHING?

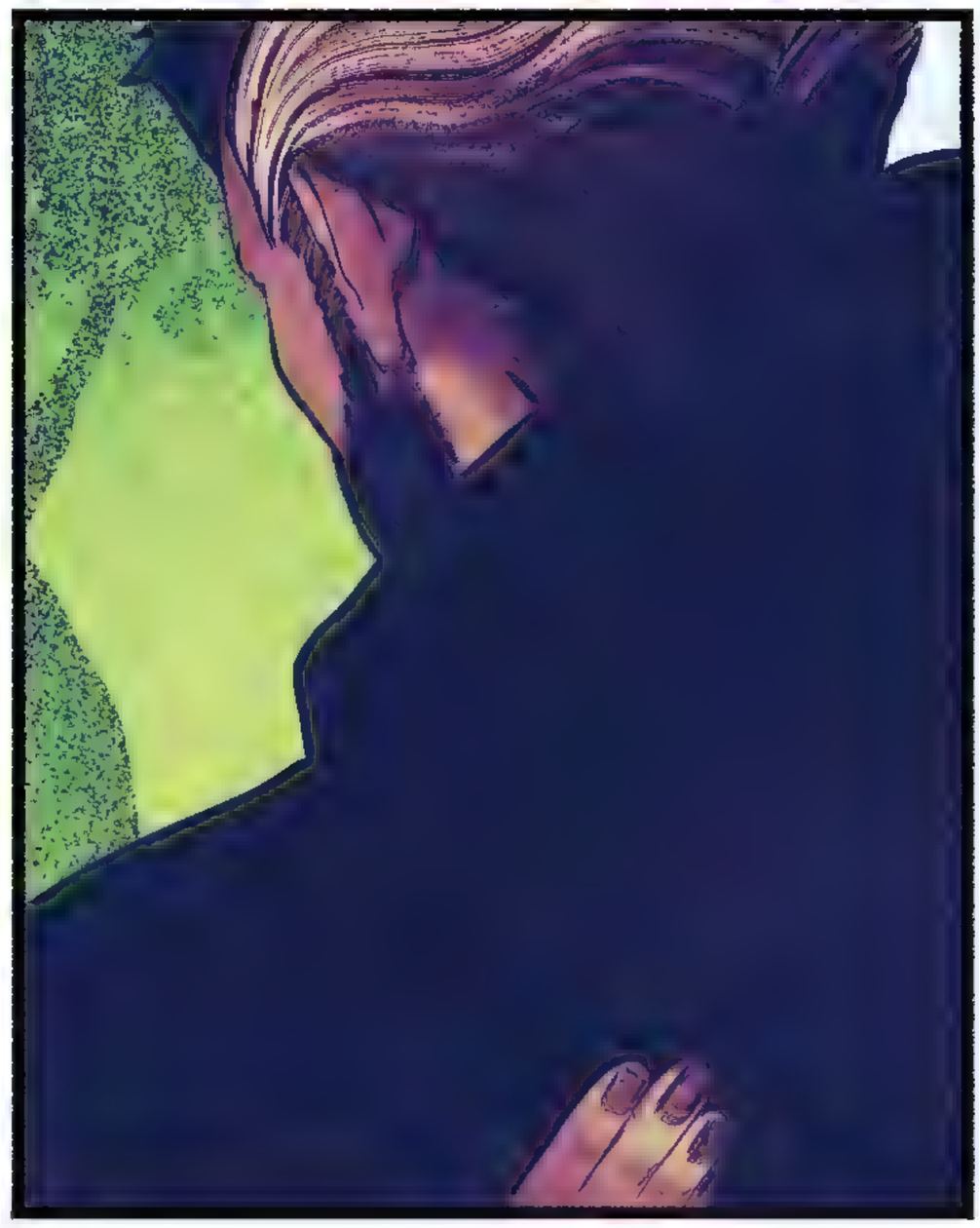
I SAW YOU ON TV IN VEGAS. YOU LOOKED GOOD. I WOULD HAVE TOLD YOU TO SHAVE THAT BEARD OFF, THOUGH.
HEHE, WELL, THANK YOU. THAT WHOLE THING WAS... THAT WAS A LOT.
SORRY I MISSED IT.
YOU ARE?

WHEN YOU LEFT, AFTER THE TOURNAMENT--YOU LEFT ME A NOTE, AND YOU NEVER GAVE ME A CHANCE TO TALK TO YOU ABOUT IT. THAT HURT... SO MUCH.
I KNOW. I'M SORRY, ZEL--
THAT'S NOT WHAT I'M LOOKING FOR.

I'M HERE BECAUSE I REALIZED I WAS DOING THE SAME THING TO YOU. I WALKED OFF.
I NEVER GAVE US... I NEVER GAVE YOU A CHANCE TO TALK.
I KNOW HOW THAT FEELS, TO HAVE THINGS LEFT UNSAID. AND IT FEELS TERRIBLE.

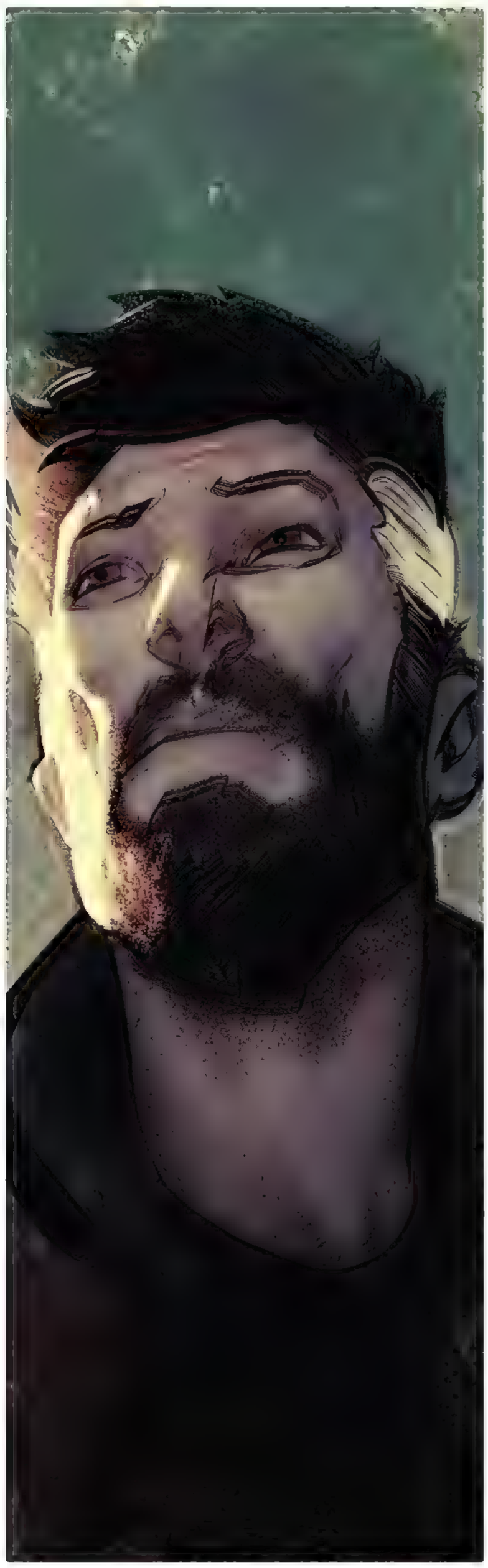
YOU SEEMED SURPRISED THAT I MISSED IT.
AND, HONESTLY... I DIDN'T THINK I WOULD. BUT THEN...AFTER I LEFT, EVER SINCE I LEFT ACTUALLY...
I'VE BEEN HAVING THESE...INSANE DREAMS. INCREDIBLY VIVID DREAMS ABOUT YOU AND ME. ABOUT OUR ADVENTURES AND...SAVING THE WORLD AND...ALL OF THAT.
AND...AND THEN TODAY IT HIT ME.
(AND THIS ISN'T A QUESTION I WOULD HAVE TO ASK OF REALLY ANY OTHER HUMAN BEING ON THE PLANET...)
BUT I STARTED WONDERING...
...ARE THESE...MY DREAMS?
OR IS STEPHEN BRINGING ME INTO HIS?
AND YOU KNOW...
...THE FACT THAT I CAN'T ANSWER THAT VERY WEIRD QUESTION?
THAT'S WHAT I MISS.

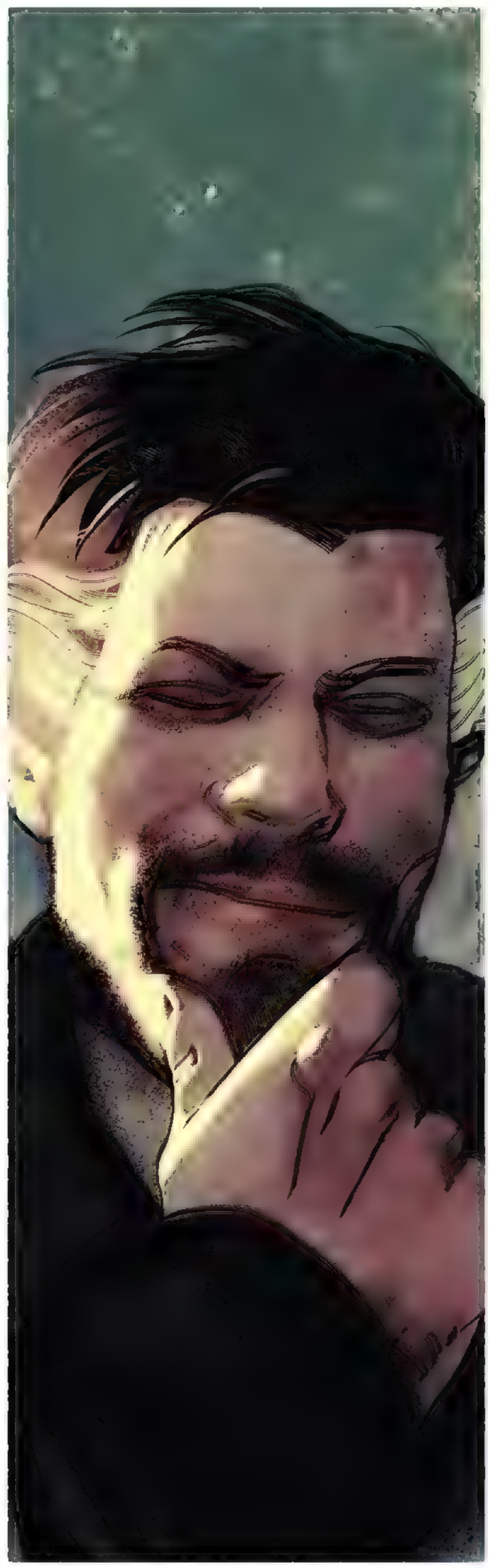
I DON'T UNDERSTAND. DOES THIS... ARE YOU COMING BACK?



NO.

BUT MAYBE I'LL SEE YOU IN MY DREAMS, DOCTOR STRANGE.





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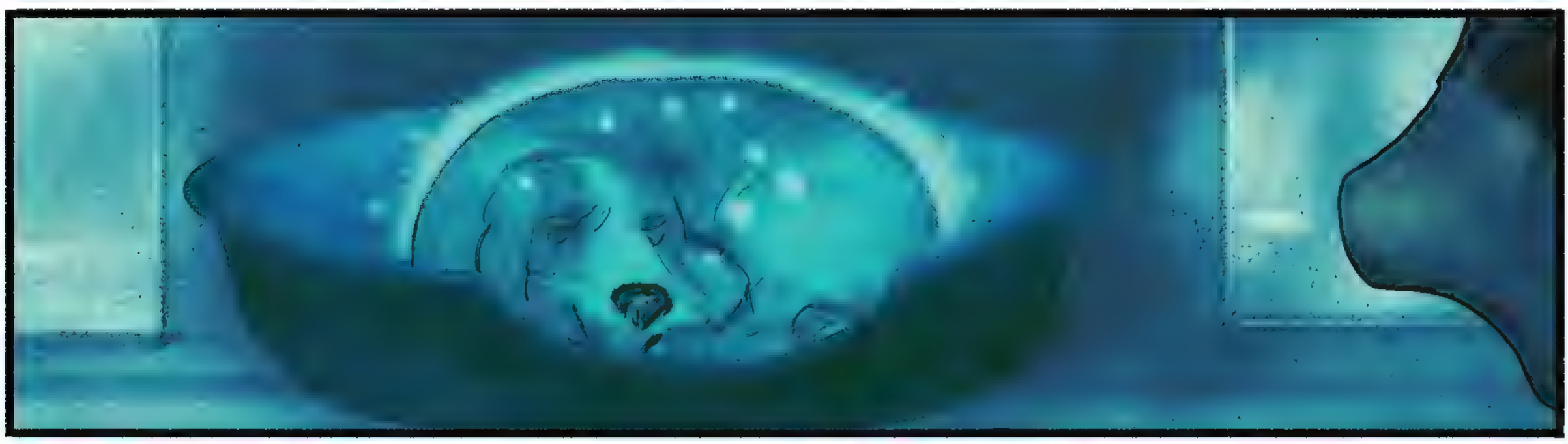

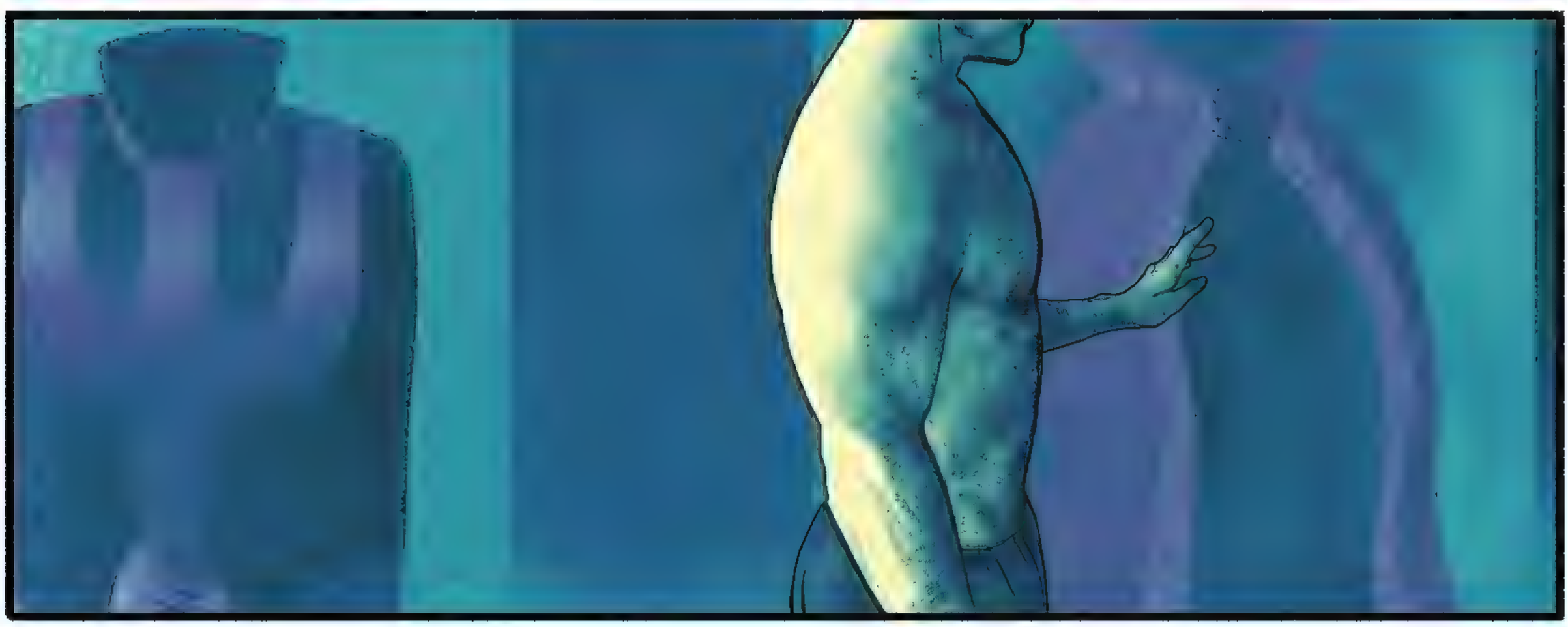

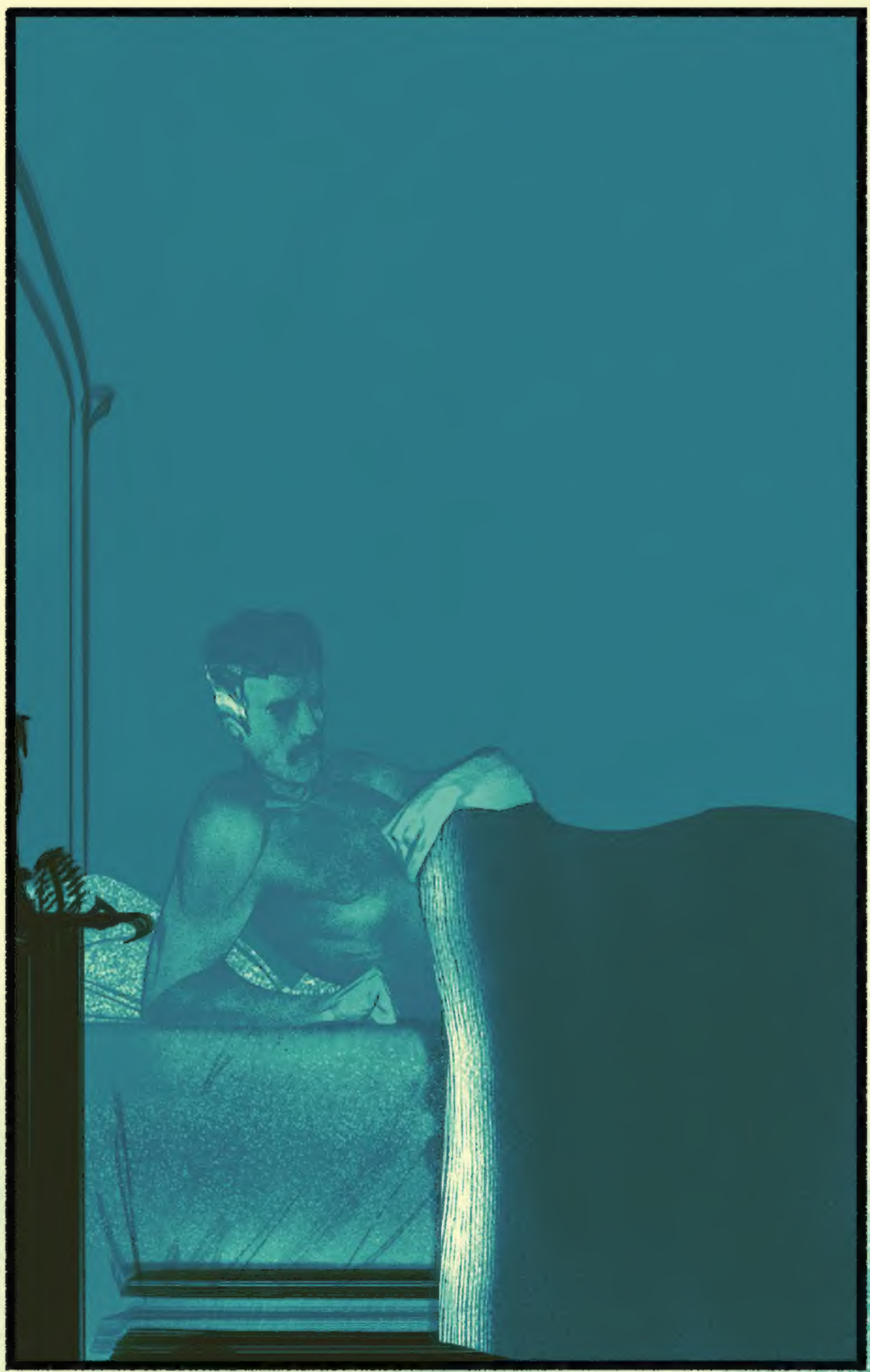

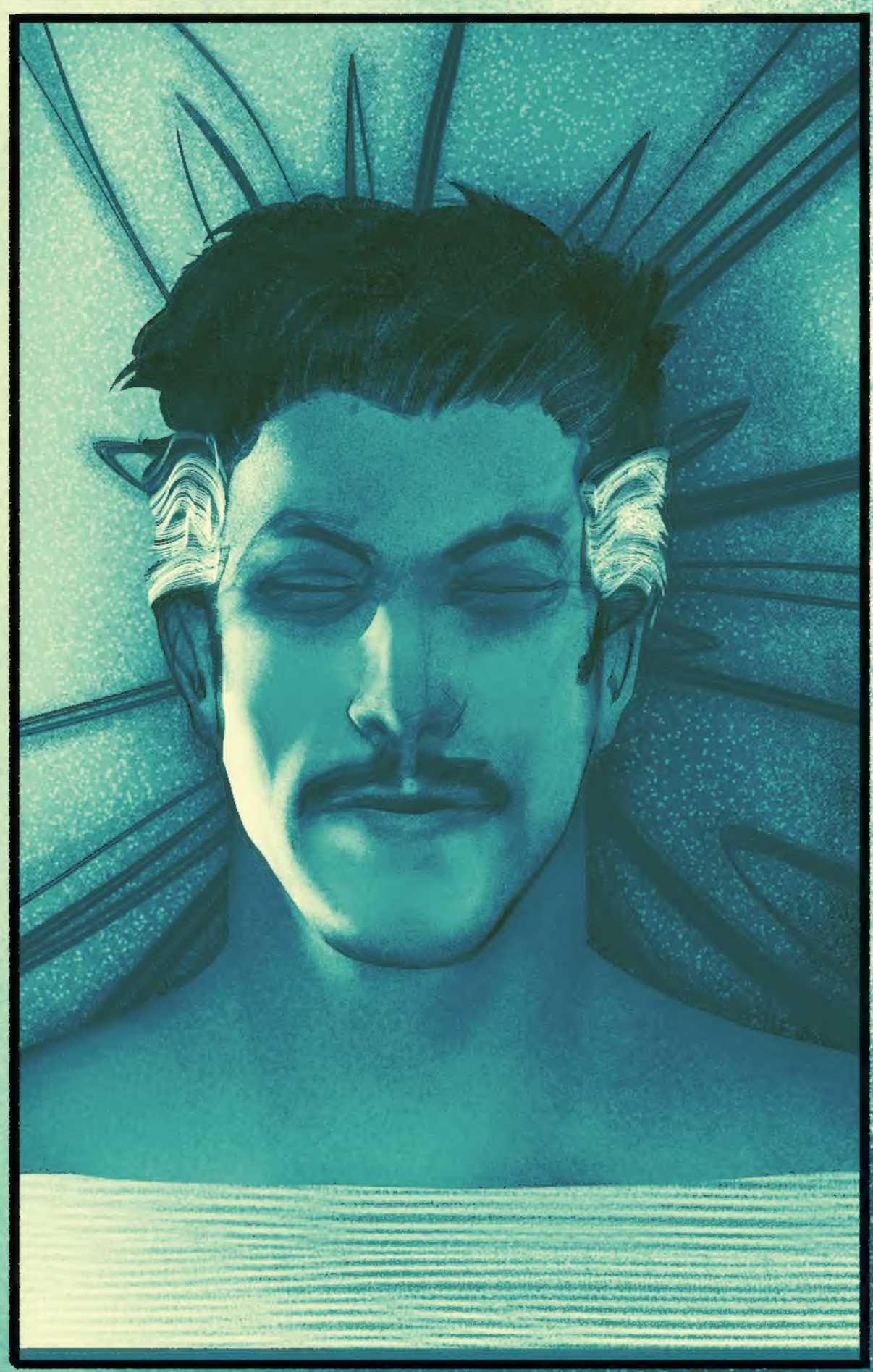

THE END.

I STILL REMEMBER HOW UTTERLY TERRIFIED I WAS TO WRITE THE FIRST ISSUE OF THIS RUN A YEAR AND CHANGE AGO.

I WAS AT HEROESCON IN NORTH CAROLINA, A CON I HAD SCHEDULED BEFORE I GOT THE CALL FROM MARVEL TO DO THIS BOOK. AS A RESULT, I WAS SWEATING BULLETS ALL WEEKEND BECAUSE, WHILE I WAS SITTING ON PANELS AND SIGNING FOR YOU GUYS, IN MY HEAD I WAS A MILLION MILES AWAY TRYING TO MOVE MY FURNITURE INTO THE SANCTUM AND TRYING MY BEST TO FIGURE OUT HOW TO ORGANIZE IT ALL WITHOUT SCUFFING THE HARDWOOD FLOORS.

I KNEW THE BASICS OF MY FIRST ISSUE, THE BIG BROAD STEPS. THE LOKI STUFF, THE THOR SCENE, THE ENDING. THE DOG. BUT I COULDN'T FIGURE OUT FOR THE LIFE OF ME HOW TO OPEN MY FIRST ISSUE.

THAT'S A RECURRING STRUGGLE FOR ME. IF I CAN ONLY FIGURE OUT THAT FIRST PANEL, I CAN GENERALLY GET THE REST MOVING. BUT ON **STRANGE**, I COULDN'T GET THERE. I COULDN'T BREAK IT. AND IT WAS DRIVING ME INSANE.

"BUT WAIT! JASON AARON IS AT THIS SHOW", I THOUGHT, "I'LL ASK HIM!" AFTER ALL, HIS ARE THE (ENORMOUSLY SCARY) SHOES I'M ATTEMPTING TO FILL HERE.

I DID EVENTUALLY GET AROUND TO ASKING JASON ABOUT HIS TAKE ON THE SORCERER SUPREME. IT WAS, OF COURSE, INSIGHTFUL AND AMAZING AND I'M NOT GOING TO TELL YOU A WORD OF IT. THOSE SECRETS ARE FOR ME. AND FOR WHOEVER ELSE WRITES THIS BOOK AFTER ME AND WANTS TO KNOW.

I WILL TELL YOU ONE THING, THOUGH. THE THING THAT UNLOCKED THE FIRST PAGE FOR ME. AT THE END OF OUR CONVERSATION, JASON LOOKED ME IN THE EYE AND HE GAVE ME THE BEST ADVICE HE'S EVER GIVEN ME.

"IT'S ALL YOURS NOW. DON'T @#$% IT UP."

I KNOW THAT SOUNDS FUNNY, BUT IT WAS A GENUINE BREAKTHROUGH FOR ME.

I SPENT SO MUCH TIME WORRYING ABOUT WHAT CAME BEFORE ME THAT I HADN'T OWNED THE BOOK YET. I HADN'T FLIPPED THAT MENTAL SWITCH IN MY HEAD THAT SAID, "THIS IS YOURS NOW. MAKE IT A BOOK YOU WOULD WANT TO READ."

AND SO THAT'S WHAT I TRIED TO DO. AND TO THAT END, I HAD MY FIRST PANEL. IT WAS SOMETHING I HAD TO SAY TO MAKE IT ALL SEEM REAL. I HAD TO OWN IT. SO, I BEGAN MY FIRST ISSUE WITH A DECLARATION OF SORTS.

TO MYSELF AS much AS TO YOU, THE FANS:

I HOPE YOU'VE ALL ENJOYED WHAT WE'VE DONE ON THE BOOK DURING MY TIME AS MANAGER HERE AT THE SANCTUM SANCTORUM. I'VE TRIED TO GIVE IT MY LEVEL BEST, AND MOSTLY, I THINK IT'S WORKED PRETTY WELL.

A HUGE THANK YOU TO GABRIEL HERNANDEZ WALTA, JORDIE BELLAIRE, NIKO HENRICHON, MIKE DEL MUNDO, ROD REIS, SZYMON KUDRANSKI, FRAZER IRVING, KATHLEEN WISNESKI, AND PERHAPS MOST OF ALL, NICK LOWE FOR MAKING THIS THE BEST GIG OF MY CAREER TO DATE.

I HOPE YOU ALL KNOW HOW MUCH I APPRECIATE AND RESPECT YOU AND YOUR INCREDIBLE WORK.

SO, YEAH... THAT'S MY TIME, FOLKS. I LEAVE YOU IN THE CONFIDENT HANDS OF AN UP-AND-COMING WRITER WITH A GREAT DEAL OF PROMISE NAMED (SQUINTS AT SOLICITATION COPY) MARK WAID. I THINK HE'S GOT A BRIGHT FUTURE AHEAD OF HIM, THAT ONE.

IT'S ALL YOURS NOW, MARK.

TAKE CARE OF MY DOG FOR ME.

AND DON'T @#$% IT UP.

THANK YOU ALL SO MUCH FOR LETTING ME PLAY IN THIS MAGICAL WORLD.

IT'S BEEN AN HONOR AND A PRIVILEGE.

EXCELSIOR.

-DONNY CATES
AUSTIN, TEXAS

NEXT: THE UNIVERSE AWAITS! **DOCTOR STRANGE #1**
BY MARK WAIRD AND JESÚS SAIZ ON SALE IN JUNE!

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ZONE